How to Conduct Natural Sounds with Planting Design in Chinese Classical Garden
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ABSTRACT
Human prefer natural sounds. Therefore, most of natural sounds, such as rain whispering, wind soughing, birds warbling, insects chirping etc are produced by climate or animal vocalization, all of these cannot be quantified into technical control in gardening practice. Only way to conduct such sounds into gardens is depending on the medium role of some landscape elements, particularly vegetation. This paper generalizes the sound beauty construction experiences of planting design in Chinese classical garden, including ‘conducting wind & rain’, ‘gathering birds & insects’; And then, the humanities connotations of natural sounds in traditional Chinese cultural, such as pine wind, bamboo wind, bird song etc, are summarized as well, which are all accompanied by planting design in Chinese classical gardens; With the case studying on some typical scenic spots for listening natural sounds, the construction experiences of how to conduct natural sounds into gardens with planting design are analyzed, also its artistic rules to refine the humanities connotations into the physical scenic are all explicated. The results suggest a new perspective to think of soundscape construction beyond technical indicators control, it is benefit for us to learn how to follow the laws of nature so that integrate soundscape construction into the gardening entity.

Keywords: Natural Sound; Planting design; Chinese classical garden; Construction technique; Artistic rules

I-INCE Classification of Subjects Number(s): 56.3

1. INTRODUCTION
As one of living elements in landscape design, plants display the vibrancy of the constant-changing universe, and every subtle change in their biological features conveys abundant signals about the time and season. While the sounds, fragrance and shadows accompanying those changes, always draw favors from poets and painters, and make up a crucial part in planting design of gardens, embraces its unique artistic orientation.

Pursuit for sound beauty is among the most prominent artistic characteristics. As what is explicitly indicated in Xian Qing Ou Ji (《闲情偶寄》) by Li Yu of Qing Dynasty, “planting trees is not merely to feast the eyes, but also to delight the ears”. Over the long history of landscape design, some unique planting design ideas have been developed in traditional Chinese gardens’ construction system: the sounds of rain and wind as well as chirping of birds and insects are delicately integrated into the design of gardens, and certain artistic rules are adopted to expand and enhance the aesthetic sense of the diverse sounds, giving birth to distinctive sound imageries, which is quite rare in the world’s system of garden landscape design.

2. CONDUCTING WIND and RAIN
Wind and rain, which are natural climatic phenomena, can generate picturesque garden landscapes when interacting with plants. The ancient Chinese were attentive to the values of plants conducting wind in very early times.

“Wind, unlike the thunder which makes sound out of nothing, cannot generate sound itself unless relying on other things. Since it makes sound only when it interacts with other things, the sound it makes differs with the things it interacts with: big or small, clear or blurred, delightful or fearful, all dependent on the things the sound derives from. Despite the strength and toughness, stones cannot make sound with wind. Whereas, the void and hollow valley makes loud and powerful sound with wind; drifting and gentle as the water is, it makes rumbling and clanging sounds. But all those sounds lack moderation and harmony, stirring up fear and fright. Only grasses and trees are the
As the structures and shapes of leaves and branches of plants diversify, the sounds they make in rain and wind differ. In light of the landscape plants conventionally used in traditional Chinese gardens, the value of those plants in demonstrating rain and wind is prominent, forming a stable mode of conducting wind and rain. The following is a brief introduction for some typical plants.

2.1 Pine Wind (Song Tao)

The pine, renowned as the “noblest of all trees”, is among the most widely-used plants in traditional gardens. With the thin and needle-like leaves, the pine makes tender and soft rustling sound. Ancient scholars name such sound as “Song Tao” (松涛) since it resembles the pleasant soughing just as sounding tides, and regard the pine as the best company for wind: “among all the grasses and tress, the ones with large leaves cause stifling sounds, withering leaves agonizing sounds, while weak leaves spineless and unmelodious sounds. Therefore, the pines are the best company for wind.”

The pines can endure coldness and are evergreen. Early in Qin Dynasty, the First Emperor of Qin granted an official title of “the fifth-class senior official” to the pine during the heaven worshipping ceremony in Mount Tai. As Confucius said, “in winter, the pine and cypress are known as the last to fade away.” Here we see the biological characteristics of pines are compared to the spiritual qualities of human, making the pine an incarnation of ideal spirits in Chinese culture. The ancients Chinese developed a habit of planting and appreciating pines in very early times, and thus the pine wind is deeply rooted in people’s heart. As recorded in literature, Tao Hongjing, the “Prime Minister in the Mountains”, “loves pine wind very much and only plants pines in his garden. He is filled with joy each time listening to the sound of pine wind.” Such works endow the pines with the characteristic of independence and seclusion, which becomes one of the most illustrated topics in artistic works of senior officials. In the verse “I appreciated the witty philosophies of Lord Tao Kan, and will lead a free life by listening to the pine wind”, the poet Lu You presents his aspiration for the dignity and seclusion of prior sages by praising the qualities of pines.

Wide stretches of pines, when swept through by the wind, provide a splendid view of sea waves and a stentorian sound of tides, becoming a conventional mode of planting design in suburban gardens. The “Wind Sweeping through Pines in Thousands of Gullies” (fig.1) of Chengde Summer Palace is a nice construction of such mode.

![Figure 1 – Wind Sweepins the pine trees at Chengde Summer Palace (by the author) ](image)

Gardens near city is relatively small and hard to be allowed wide planting of pines, so most just arrange a few vigorous and gnarled pines to satisfy the visitors’ penchant of listening to the wind. In Treatise on Superfluous Things (《长物志》), the author Wen Zhenheng writes: “each house shall have a tree planted, with aragonites as the base or taihu stones (porous stones) as the fence. ... Pines shall grow on mountaintops. When the dragon scale-like pines are planted, the exhilarating sound of pine waves is then promised. So why not plant pines in the garden?” which is exactly the mode of pine wind construction in small gardens.

2.2 Bamboo Wind (Zhu Xiao)
Bamboos are indispensable landscape plants in traditional Chinese gardens, and there is even a proverb saying “would rather eat no meat than live without bamboos”. Bamboo leaves are thin and dense, and when there is wind, the sound the leaves produce can be strong or weak dependent on the strength of the wind. Sometimes it is whispering like silkworms on the leaves (quoted from “noisy as if silkworms were gnawing at the mulberry leaves”); sometimes the sound fluctuates like a mix of various tonalities (quoted from “bamboos create sounds of diverse tonalities when caressed by wind”). Ancient scholars think this sound as euphonious as the sound created by tinkling pieces of cracked jade, and acclaim this sound as the sound of “tinkling-jade”(Jia Yu). As recorded in 《Nan Bu Yan Hua Lu》, “the queen (of Emperor Yong of Sui) was appreciating a bamboo beside the pond when finding it was withering. Later, each time she thought of the sound of the bamboo, she tossed and turned, failing to fall asleep. The Emperor ordered the courtiers to manufacture a dozen of dragon-shape jade pendants, hanging them with silk threads under the eaves. In the evenings, the jade pendants clashed in the wind, producing a sound similar to that of bamboos rattled by the wind.” This little paragraph evidences how deeply bamboos impress people with the appealing sound.

Bamboo looks tall and unrestrained, it has the grace of a gentleman; elegant and sublime, it has the spirit of senior officials who are indifferent to wealth and fame; upright and empty inside, it resembles the quality of toughness, persistence and modesty; never bent or broken when folded, the bamboo has courage and dignity; the bamboo remains evergreen over the seasons, symbolizing tenacity and toughness. Moreover, bamboo is also an instrument of Buddhism and bears in-depth Zen connotations, as stated in “the green bamboo is embodiment of truth and law; the chrysanthemum contains the highest wisdom of life.” In another literary masterpiece Records of Diverse Matters, it is stated that “the two daughters of Emperor Yao, also the two queens of Emperor Shun, are called Xiang goddesses. They cried sorrowfully when Emperor Shun died. The tears from them fell upon the bamboos and the bamboos became spotted.” Due to this tale, the spotted bamboos are connected with fidelity to love and sorrowful emotions, which expands the charm of bamboos. The traditional sorrowful imagery of “night rain on Xiaoxiang” is the theme that the mottled bamboos in gardens want to build up and manifest another kind of sound charm of bamboos in the rain. Fig2 shows a typical bamboo senary in Cui-Ling-Long of Cang Lang Ting garden.

![Figure 2 – Bamboo wind in Cui-Ling-Long of Cang Lang Ting garden (by the author)](image)

### 2.3 Plantain Rain (Jiao Yu)

The leaves of plantains are large and have big gaps between, making this kind of plant suitable to hold the rain. “The plantains have large leaves with big gaps between, and produce sounds when the rain drops on. The sounds produced are consistent with the speed and scale of the rain. In fact, the plantains do not make sounds themselves, but rely on the rain. Without the rain, the plantains grow silently; but the rain cannot make sound if there were no gaps between plantain leaves, so the rain and plantains coordinate with each other.”

The refreshing and vibrant green color of plantain enhances the attraction of landscapes in gardens. As recorded in literature, Huaisu, a famous calligrapher in Tang Dynasty, lived in poverty and often couldn’t afford to buy paper. So he planted many plantains to write on the leaves. Since then, “writing letters all over the plantain leaves” and “composing poems on the plantain leaves” become a favor for scholars, and therefore, the plantain is connected to this scholarly interest. Plantain is also an instrument of Buddhism. The monkey king borrowed the plantain fan from iron-fan princess so that he could pass through the mountains of flames. In modern times, Chen Keyin pointed out that “according to studies, the Indian Buddhism always compares the human body
to plants which can be easily torn or peeled like the plantain. In doing so, it explains that the Yin aura is void and the physical body can perish. [2] so the plantain is linked to Zen, which deepens its philosophical connotations.

Plantains are widely planted in gardens in Jiang Nan area, just as recorded in 《Xian Qing Ou Ji》: “If there is some space in a tranquil garden, it would be good to plant some plantains.” Therefore, “Raindrops rattling on the plantain leaves” become a common view in gardens. Since the leaves are “large and have big gaps between”, they can be easily torn by the wind. So in traditional gardens, they are planted in clumps along the high walls or rockeries against the wind, providing a view of tender green plantains which can be observed from the windows of the secluded rooms or tranquil chambers in the garden. The imagery “delicate plantain shadows overlooked from void windows” which is depicted in Craft of Gardens presents the common scene of plantain-overlooking windows in gardens, giving birth to the unique soundscape mode of “listening to the rain by the plantain-overlooking windows” in traditional gardens. There is a window of this kind in the Listening-to-the-Rain Pavilion in the Humble Administrator's Garden (fig.3).

![Listening-to-the-Rain Pavilion in the Humble Administrator's Garden](image1)

**Figure 3 Listening-to-the-Rain Pavilion in the Humble Administrator's Garden**

### 2.4 Lotus Rain (He Sheng)

Lotus, with broad leaves suitable to hold the raindrops, is a crucial and indispensable landscape plant for the pool and lake in traditional Chinese gardens. Every late autumn when the bleak rain pelts down on the lotus leaves, it makes a clear and pattering sound. Li Dongyang in Ming Dynasty once built a pavilion named “Listening-to-the-rain Pavilion”, and in the prose to note the construction of the pavilion, it writes “I observed you renovate the northern apartment into a pavilion... with all the assorted trees and flowers grown in front of the pavilion, I love lotus the best. The two tubs in the pond are always teeming with lotuses. I enjoy the lotus most when it rains. The sounds made when the rain splashes on the lotus leaves are diverse: quick or slow, dense or sparse, as if following certain rhythmic schemes.” Ancient scholars specifically grow lotuses in the two tubs in the pond, which displays their keen favor for listening to the rain on lotus and evidences their expertise in the planting design of conducting wind and rain.

![Listening-to-the-Rain Pavilion in the Humble Administrator's Garden](image2)

**Figure 4 Listening-to-the-Rain Pavilion in the Humble Administrator's Garden (By the author)**

Lotus remains stainless and clean even it grows out of the muddy pond, so it is always
regarded as embodiment of beauty, purity and fidelity. The melodious sound the lotus leaves make with the raindrops is also a favored topic under the pens of poets and painters. Li Shangyin, a renowned poet in Tang Dynasty, once wrote: “the boat in the bamboo grove is clean, and the pavilion on the river is tranquil. I missed my brothers but couldn’t get my feelings through to them across those high walls. The dark clouds linger in the sky and frost came late this year. The withered lotus leaves on the river are left for me to listen to the bleak rain over the night.” In the poem, the poet connects the sound of rain pattering on the withered lotus leaves with his homesickness and nostalgia. “Sound of rain on withered lotus leaves” bears a feeling of sorrow, and becomes a major imagery in gardens to display the bleak scenery in autumns. Fig4 shows a kind of soundscape Listening to the lotus rain.

2.5 Parasol Tree Rain (Tong Yin)

The Chinese parasol tree (Wutong tree) has thick crown covers, rendering it a good shading plant. In Chen Jiru’s Xiao Chuan You Ji (《小窗幽记》) from Ming Dynasty, it is written that “for a quite studio, one should have some green Wutong trees in front and some emerald bamboos behind.” Ni Zan, one of the Four Great Masters of Yuan painting built a pavilion entitled “Pavilion of Tranquility” with large spreads of shading parasol trees in front and called himself a pseudonym “Yun Lin” (meaning forests of clouds). With broad leaves, the Chinese parasol trees produce melodious and refreshing sounds with the rain splashing on. Bai Juyi appreciated such sounds in his poem that “For you, the wutong tree makes rhythmic sounds that resemble the clashing of fine jades; such clear sounds even outmatch the best music chapters of Zheng and Wei Kingdoms.” Thus the sound of Chinese parasol trees also becomes a common theme in the construction of sound beauty in gardens.

The Chinese parasol tree is also named green parasol tree. Green implies purity and clarity, which are consistent with the spirit of intellectuals with literary reputation who cherishes a pure soul and an otherworldly mind. In Zhuangzi, there are sentences like “the phoenix never perches on trees other than the Wutong tree”, which adds a sense of elegance and dignity to the parasol trees. Furthermore, the wood of Chinese parasol trees is good materials to make Chinese Qin, so “the sound of Chinese parasol trees” can also be interpreted as “the sound of Qin”. If relating to the friendship allusion between Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi, we may also further interpret the sound of Chinese parasol trees as the friendship between bosom friends, and it becomes the theme that landscapes like “Lodge of Wutong Sound” want to express. Additionally, the Wutong tree burgesons late but its leaves fall early, and there is a saying that “a falling leaf of Wutong indicates the advent of the autumn”, so Wutong leaves are also used to amplify the sorrowful atmosphere in autumns: “Wutong trees and the night rain don’t attend to the grief I suffered from parting my beloved; each leaf and each drop of the autumn rain pattered the porch lonely till the twilight.” Therefore, the sound of Wutong becomes the byword of sorrow and grief one suffers from parting.

3. GATHERING BIRDS AND INSECTS

A garden with fascinating hills and waterscapes as well as luxuriant vegetation always attracts birds and insects, composing a chapter of vitality with birds chattering and insects chirping. The natural Shanshui pattern in traditional Chinese gardens which “though made by human, seems like genuinely arranged by gods.” can foster the vigorous growth of diverse vegetation.

Oriole, also known as yellow warbler, is the best singer in gardens, and the Chinese often compare its singing to the wonderful melodies composed by human. The magpie, regarded as the bird of luck, often produces clear and refreshing sounds, and there is a widely-spread saying that “good luck comes when the magpie tweets”. The tweets of swallows are often soft and gentle, as if they are whispering. “Whisper of swallows” is one of the most frequently-used media for ancient people to express their sentiments over the changes in life and vent their grief when they missed their beloved ones. Cuckoo enjoys chirping in the mornings, and the sound it makes “cu-ekoo” resembles the pronunciation of “bugu” in Chinese (literarily means scattering the rice seeds), so in Chinese cuckoo is also called “bugu bird”. The chirps of cuckoo are regarded as the signals to start working in the morning and thus have the connotation of making efforts and
shoudering responsibilities. Cicada is also named as “zhiliao” in Chinese. The ancients thought that it eats nothing but drinking the dews, so it is renowned as “Boyì and Shuqi among the insects” (Boyì and Shuqi are eminent sages living in the Shang Dynasty). Other insects like the bell crickets, katydids, and grasshoppers that usually hide among the grasses, flowers or cracks of rocks are pastime pets of senior officials in ancient China. The sound they make also have diverse connotations. Limited by the length of the paper, only the experience about gathering birds and insects in gardens is summarized herein.

Firstly, birds and insects with melodious voices like the oriole, magpie, cuckoo and cicada enjoy perching on high branches. High trees like the willow, pagoda tree (sophora japonica), elm, banyan and Chinese parasol tree which are usually seen in gardens are frequented by those birds and insects, especially the willow, as written in the line “(willows) are always the where the orioles chatter with each other and where the cicadas dwell.” The scenic spot Orioles Singing in Willows (fig.5), one of the ten famous scenic spots of West Lake, is renowned for the stretches of spring willows that attract large flocks of orioles. Ji Cheng grew several hectares of willows in his Shadows Garden, and created three scenic views, i.e. “shadow of willows, shadow in the water and shadow of mountains”. In Autobiography of Shadows Garden, the author Zheng Yuanxun wrote: the orioles favor willows. They gather in areas teeming with willows and sing merrily. So visitors who enjoy listening to the songs of orioles always go to gardens with large areas of willows. It shall be noted that Ji Chen is a scholar conversant with planting design in gardens, so it can be assumed that his construction technique of “planting several hectares of willows” is for the sake of creating an imagery resembling what is illustrated in the line “the birds chirping in the willows in the garden also changed.”

In addition, it’s also a conventional practice to grow fruit trees in Chinese gardens. Fruit trees like peaches, plums, pears, apricots, cherries, oranges, crabapples and pomegranates not only have beautiful flowers, but also attract the birds with their fruits, making picturesque scenery with tweet of birds and aroma of flowers. Ancient people have cumulated much experience on this aspect of landscape design. Malus asiatica (Chinese pearleaf crabapple), a kind of rosaceae arbor, is commonly known as Linqin in Chinese (same pronunciation as another Chinese phrase meaning “birds in the woods”). There are records about this fruit tree: “Linqin is also named Laiqin (inviting birds), because it attracts birds from the woods.” Cherry is also named as hantao in Chinese (the word “han” in Chinese means keeping something in the mouth, “tao” means cherry), “because the birds like keep the cherry in their mouths. … When cherries are ripe, the birds must keep the fruits in mouth lest other birds like sparrows or light-vented bulbuls plunder all the cherries.” There is a scenic spot named “Path of Red Cherries” in East Manor in Ming Dynasty, about which Wu Yan once wrote: “when picking the cherries, I left a few to feed the birds.” From it, we may observe the ancients’ conversancy with gathering birds and insects with the plants.

Seasonal flowers such as peony, Chinese rose, begonia, rose, lotus, multiflora and jasmine are necessary decorations in gardens, and the aroma they emit always draws dancing bees and butterflies. There is a scenic spot titled “Porch of Vines and Flowers” in Sui Garden of Nanjing, about which Yuan Zuzhi wrote in his Miscellaneous Notes of Sui Garden that “it is teeming with throngs of butterflies and bees when the flowers blossom, filling the place with much Spring.”
So attracting bees and butterflies is also a construction technique of flower planting design in gardens.

Furthermore, traditional Chinese gardens also pursue an artistic sense of history and vicissitudes, so the sere vines and old trees are prioritized in choices for planting design. From the perspective of ecology, sere vines and old trees are often inhabited by insects, which may attract birds that are seeking food, and they can also provide shelters for birds to build their nests. Therefore, an old tree can be a heaven for baby birds.

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In the long history of landscape design, designers of traditional Chinese gardens have observed the inextricable relationship between plants and natural sounds, and they integrate this relationship into the planting design techniques: “cultivating flowers can attract butterflies... planting pines can invite the wind ... growing plantain can draw the rain and fostering willows can endear the cicadas.’ The construction of sound beauty thus becomes internalized as a basic part in planting design of gardens, which ensures the production of assorted natural sounds in the gardens. In the long-time practice of arts, the Chinese culture also endows rich cultural connotations with the natural sounds. The abundance of imageries and affluence of expressed feelings are far beyond reach of other things, which underlies the cultural origins for the conversion of natural sounds into humanistic imageries.

4. A CASE STUDY ON CONDUCTING NATURAL SOUND BY PLANTING DESIGN

The Listening to the Rain Pavilion is located in a tranquil courtyard of Humble Administrator's Garden, plantains can be found behind the window(Fig6). Due to the traditional building has a very big roof, and there is a ring corridor around with it, make the interior of the building very dark. Looking out of the dark room, a cluster of plantains is exposed in sunshine, pushing the bright plantains forward, just as the imagery of “delicate plantain shadows overlooked from void windows” which is depicted in Craft of Garden (fig 3).

![Figure 6 – Plan of Listening to the Rain Pavilion Yard (Quoted from Pan Guxi, 《Landscaping Art in JianNan》， Southeast University Press, 2003.01.P52.)](image)

The Listening to the Rain Pavilion is designed as a typical scene of “listening to the rain on plantains at the window”. The results of meteorological data statistics show that the rainy days accounted for 36% a year in Suzhou city, and more concentrated in the spring and summer. Due to plantains prefer warm and humidity environment, the spring and summer season in JianNan area are the best time for plantains growing, just correspond to the the rainy season, the so-called “listening to the rain on plantains at the window” is given birth by such background.

The climate is relatively cold in the autumn and winter, in order to offer a safe winter to the plantains, and guarantee it growing well in the coming year. JiangNan gardens usually cut off the plantains’ leaves and wrapped its main trunk in straw, Figure 7 shows the winter scenery of Listening to the Rain Pavilion, It is totally different from what’s shown in Figure 3, rendering out of a kind of season sentiment of desolate winter.
Obviously, plants serve as media to conduct natural sound in Chinese traditional gardens are not follow any evaluation criteria, in terms of quantitative or qualitative expression of the physical properties, it is more about the artistic comprehension of natural law. There is a pond before the pavilion, with lotus in it and plantains and bamboos around as well. The South Tang poet Li Zhong of the Five Dynasties period wrote in a poem, “Listen to the rain entering autumn bamboo, and ask the monk to stay to play the traditional chess”. Yang Wan-li of the Song Dynasty had the following words in his poem “Autumn Rain Sighed”, “Plantain-leaf half-yellow and Lotus-leaf green, there is only one sound of the autumn rain”. Plantain, bamboo, lotus foliage are all present here. No matter spring or autumn, summer or winter, plantains’ leaves luxuriant or withered, sound of rain with various taste could be heard.

Figure 7 Listening-to-the-Rain Pavilion in Winter Season (by the author)

5. CONCLUSION

Conducting natural sound is a crucial character of planting design in traditional Chinese gardens, the general aim of which does not follow any evaluation criteria in terms of quality or quantity regulations, but to demonstrate how, in the close interaction of all living elements in the universe, the plants display vigor and vitality of plants in its participation in the world’s growth and development. Through artistic expression of the sound of wind and rain as well as chirps of birds and insects, traditional Chinese gardens, in an integrated and natural way, demonstrate the indispensable natural elements such as biological properties of plants, climate changes and alteration of seasons, and even the interactive relationship that “everything intermingles with each other” between all things in the universe. This concept can be neither simplified as icons in the design blueprint nor quantified as technical indicators in engineering practice, so they cannot be absorbed or grasped by the logic and rationality-oriented modern design theories. However, this idea and some ephemeral moments in life complement each other well, which inspires philosophical contemplation, arouses emotional empathy and ultimately develops an artistic conception, and thus provides a corner in the heart where the life rejoice and settles down. It is the essence of planting design in traditional Chinese gardens, and also the key connotation for its soundscape construction.

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